

Journalists in China say Yahoo accounts hacked

March 30 2010, By ANITA CHANG , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Yahoo e-mail accounts belonging to foreign journalists appeared to have been hacked and Google's Chinese search engine was intermittently blocked because of an internal change Tuesday, the latest troubles in China's heavily censored Internet market.

The Yahoo Inc. accounts of at least three journalists and an analyst became inaccessible over the last few weeks. They were greeted with messages saying, "We've detected an issue with your account" and were told to contact Yahoo, they said Tuesday. Yahoo technicians told one of the four that his account had been hacked and restored his access, but it was not clear if the other instances were related.

Sensitivity about [Internet security](#) has run high since Google Inc. announced in January it might leave China after a series of cyberattacks and complaints about [censorship](#). Last week, Google made a partial retreat, shutting down its mainland-based search engine and redirecting those queries offshore, to the freer Chinese territory of Hong Kong.

Analysts have been watching closely to see if China retaliates for Google's high-profile departure from the mainland search engine market.

Many redirected queries appeared blocked Tuesday on the Hong Kong-based [search engine](#). Although searches for benign terms were met with results on Chinese competitors such as Baidu.com and Soso.com, an error page would pop up when the same terms were typed into

Google.com.hk.

Google blamed the trouble on an internal revision made in an effort to deliver the best search results.

But the intended upgrade backfired in mainland China, where it collided with the country's "Great Firewall" - the nickname for the tools the government uses to block access to sites deemed to subversive or pornographic.

The new settings inserted a string of characters that included "rfa" into Web site addresses. China's Great Firewall apparently interpreted those letters as attempts to reach Radio Free Asia, one of the sites on the government's forbidden list.

Google said it was working on a solution to the problem.

Web searches weren't the only Google service bogging down in China. The company reported that access to its mobile services in the country were "partially blocked" this week after experiencing no issues last week. [Google](#) didn't provide a reason for the mobile disruption.

It was not clear where problems with the Yahoo e-mail accounts originated. All four people affected are professionally focused on China and related issues. They said they had heard of other colleagues having similar problems, including one journalist who lost his Yahoo account entirely in January.

Clifford Coonan, China correspondent for The Independent and the Irish Times newspapers, said he received the "issue with your account" notice when he logged in Tuesday. Another reporter said she received repeated error messages from Yahoo last month.

The Western analyst said he was locked out of his account for four or five days, until he spoke with a Yahoo representative Monday who went through the security questions and restarted it.

"He said somebody had hacked into my registration details," said the analyst, who would not give his name, citing the sensitivity of the issue. The analyst said he was concerned hackers may have also accessed his inbox.

[Yahoo](#), based in Sunnyvale, Calif., issued a statement Tuesday condemning all hacking attacks and vowed to "take appropriate action in the event of any kind of breach."

Coonan wondered whether he was just part of a broad attack against Yahoo's e-mail accounts, or if he had been specifically targeted.

"I'd just be interested to see if anyone in the business community or outside of journalism and academia has had the same problem, then it might be less sinister," he said. "It's obviously annoying but if it's just journalists and academics, that's scary."

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